

BUILDING THE IBEROSPHERE? A BALANCE OF THE RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RIGHT IN THE AMERICAS AND SPAIN

CONSTRUINDO A IBEROSFERA? UM BALANÇO DA RECENTE ATUAÇÃO DA DIREITA INTERNACIONAL NAS AMÉRICAS E NA ESPANHA

Julián Castro-Rea¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9048-6563>

ABSTRACT

The Madrid Charter—a manifesto launched by the Spanish party Vox calling for the unification of international conservative political forces—sets as its objective the construction of the so-called “*Iberosphere*”; a vast global geographic area with common cultural and historical references and committed to the program of the right and conservatism. This attempt has run parallel to other activities carried out by various conservative organizations with an international vocation (CPAC, FIL, NEOS, *The Movement*, etc.) This article offers a record of these activities and evaluates their impacts. Have they managed to advance the construction of the *Iberosphere*? What do they mean for global geopolitics? Have they become permanent movements? In addition to the descriptive follow-up, this paper also explains the communication and influence networks that have recently developed among international conservative organizations. It attempts to demonstrate that, inspired by the ideas of the New Right, the international conservative movement is advancing slowly but inexorably, promoting a new international order defined by civilizational lines; although it encounters obstacles related to alternative transnational projects and political culture and party tradition in different national contexts.

Keywords: *Iberosphere*; right-wing politics; New Right; transnational movements; conservative networks.

¹ Doutor em Ciência Política pela *Université de Montréal*. Professor do Departamento de Ciência Política da *University of Alberta/Canadá*. E-mail: jcrea@ualberta.ca.

RESUMO

A Carta de Madrid – um manifesto lançado pelo partido espanhol Vox apelando à unificação das forças políticas conservadoras internacionais – estabelece como objectivo a construção da chamada “*Iberosfera*”; uma vasta área geográfica global com referências culturais e históricas comuns e comprometida com o programa da direita e do conservadorismo. Esta tentativa tem decorrido paralelamente a outras actividades desenvolvidas por diversas organizações conservadoras de vocação internacional (CPAC, FIL, NEOS, *O Movimento*, etc.). Este artigo oferece um registro dessas atividades e avalia seus impactos. Conseguiram avançar na construção da *Iberosfera*? O que eles significam para a geopolítica global? Tornaram-se movimentos permanentes? Além do acompanhamento descritivo, este artigo também explica as redes de comunicação e influência que se desenvolveram recentemente entre organizações conservadoras internacionais. Tenta demonstrar que o movimento conservador internacional, inspirado pelas ideias da nova direita, está a avançar lenta mas inexoravelmente, promovendo uma nova ordem internacional definida por linhas civilizacionais; embora encontre obstáculos relacionados com projetos transnacionais alternativos e com a cultura política e tradição partidária em diferentes contextos nacionais.

Palavras-chave: *Iberosfera*; política de direita; nova direita; movimentos transnacionais; redes conservadoras.

CONTEXT

The national and international liberal order is in crisis. Liberal democracy has lost the prestige and legitimacy it once enjoyed. The ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza are accelerating the crisis of the liberal world order, exposing the hypocrisy and double standards of the Western World. This is especially true regarding the United States, still leader of the Western World, heavily guided by a neoconservative geopolitical agenda despite government alternations (Greenwald, 2017). Multilateral institutions, led by the UN, are increasingly illegitimate and inefficient in guaranteeing world peace and cooperation between countries; even when precisely world peace and cooperation were the main motivations for the institutions’ creation eighty years ago. The group of countries called BRICS (made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China

and South Africa, associated with fourteen more countries²) rises in power and influence in the world, threatening Western hegemony.

This empirical confirmation, which seems to announce chaos and an uncertain future for the world order, opens nonetheless a space of opportunity for the international right.

Inspired by the proposals of ideologues such as Alain de Benoist, Aleksandr Dugin, Julius Evola, Guillaume Faye and their followers, the so-called New Right promotes an alternative to what it calls “globalism”; that is, the combination of the postwar liberal international order plus the neoliberal reconfiguration of the world that occurred since the 1990s.

From its outset, the New Right had a transnational vocation. It aimed to transcend the narrow nationalism of the traditional European right, which led to isolation and conflict in the first half of the 20th century, through a discourse that unites the particular issues of different countries with a common diagnosis applicable to different national contexts (Bar-On, 2011, pp. 199, 202). In this way, the New Right has been able to build bridges between various right-wing political organizations, European ones in particular, providing them with rhetorical weapons and at the same time drawing on their local electoral victories. The New Right has provided ideological weapons to successful right-wing parties such as *Rassemblement National* (France), *Lega Nord* (Italy), *Reform UK Party* (United Kingdom), and *Alternative für Deutschland* (Germany), and at the same time has benefited from their triumphs (Bar-On, 2011, p. 207).

Strongly inspired on the ideas of pro-Nazi philosopher Carl Schmitt, for the New Right the current global crisis demonstrates the fallacy of the liberal cosmopolitan project—human rights, gender equality, equality between nations, universal legal regime, voluntary international migration, protection of refugees, etc.—inaugurated in the postwar period and dominated by the United States. The world order that emerged after the Second World War, according to the New Right, is not progress but the construction of an unnatural depoliticized, homogeneous world, with peace built over fictitious bases of equality among nations; where US values of savage capitalism, consumerism and political correctness prevail.

This liberal consensus also had another negative consequence: the emasculation of the Western world, due to the excessive glorification of peace and other “gynocratic” values. The result is a liberal society without a father figure, narcissistic and weak, that constantly resorts to victimization, dialogue instead of action, and endless psychological therapy (Crone, 2020: 75). Thus, within the logic of the New Right, combating “gender ideology” is a necessary step to recover the greatness of Western civilization.

Within this logic, the New Right defends the relevance of reorganizing the world according to civilizational lines. In this vision, human civilizations—defined by common ethnicity, religion, traditions, language, values and other ethnocultural attributes—are irreducible to a common pattern, because they contain within themselves different ontological bases and different norms

2 At the moment this article was written, new full members are Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran and Indonesia. Nine more countries have been admitted with the lesser status of “partners”, on their way to full membership: Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan. Argentina and Saudi Arabia were invited to join the group, although Saudi Arabia has not ratified the invitation and Argentina declined it.

of social coexistence.³ It makes sense then to reorganize the world by recognizing and respecting these ancestral differences, renouncing the imposition of common standards for all humanity as liberalism intends (Bar-On, 2011, p. 208).

Abandoning the fallacy of the nation state, another undesirable creation of liberal modernity according to the New Right, the world must be divided into “Great Spaces” (Schmitt) or “areas of civilization” (Benoist) that comprise mutually compatible cultures and ethnic groups. The model to follow is the Roman Empire, with a central authority but multicultural provinces; a federation of organic communities with wide margins of autonomy for each component. The options are clear: “The unity or plurality of the world, the universe or the ‘pluriverse’, homogeneous globalization or globalization in harmony with the diversity of cultures and peoples” (Crone, 2020, p. 76)

The New Right has therefore, since its origins, a transnational vocation, that is, it wishes to make its influence felt beyond the countries where it originated; France in particular (Crone, 2020, p. 70). Its ideas have served explicitly or implicitly to shore up transnational right-wing movements, because “...increasingly they seem to capture the spirit and... rhyme with the anti-immigration sentiments present in the West, the praise of strong leaders, and the longing of renewed virility and geopolitics” (Crone, 2020, p. 70.)

In this way, in addition to supporting national conservative actors, the efforts deployed by right-wing activists to build the so-called *Iberosphere* implicitly contribute to the

transnational project sketched by the New Right. It is not only about supporting national movements and parties to ensure their survival, growth and maximize their opportunities to govern their countries of origin. It is also about building a transnational space of countries with shared history, similar cultures and compatible governments; that could eventually replace the liberal world order. That is the ultimate objective, from my point of view, of the construction of the *Iberosphere*.

THE MADRID CHARTER: IMPERIAL NOSTALGIA

The Madrid Charter⁴ is a manifesto and a call to political action launched on October 26, 2020 by the Disenso Foundation, the intellectual arm of the Spanish political party Vox (Disenso Foundation, 2020). Over time, the Charter has become an instrument to declare the public commitment to fight for common objectives, endorsed by dozens of political figures in the Spanish-speaking world and beyond.

The Madrid Charter introduces the concept of *Iberosphere*, implicitly understood as the Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries, in Europe and the Americas. The original relationship

3 Vision similar to that offered by Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996).

4 Madrid has become the unofficial centre of the Spanish-speaking right-wing transnational movement; thanks to the support and sponsorship of its mayor, Isabel Díaz-Ayuso. Interestingly, it has also become the chosen place of residence of prominent right-wing figures, like Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa and his son Álvaro, former Mexican presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto.

between these countries is of course a product of colonialism; the dimension of recreating the colonial space is not alien to the objectives of the Charter and its promoters.

The *Iberosphere*, the document states, is a global region that comprises more than 700 million people who share a common cultural heritage and represent great economic and geopolitical potential. Unfortunately, according to the Charter, that potential cannot be fully realized because part of the region is hijacked by interests that the authors of the Charter consider nefarious: communists, drug trafficking, Cuba, the Forum of São Paulo, the Puebla Group⁵ and unidentified “third countries.” The Charter, therefore, calls for resistance against these threats to freedoms, rights, prosperity and development; and commits those who sign it to contribute to the defence of the rule of law, separation of powers, freedom of expression, private property, democracy, human rights, pluralism, human dignity and justice.

This call to defend general principles of social and political coexistence, also addressed to political and social leaders with diverse ideas, appears to be based on ideological plurality. However, that appearance is denied in reality by the political profiles of the signatories. Among them the following names stand out:

- Vanessa Kaiser, from Chile; sister of right-wing activist and best-selling author Axel Kaiser⁶
- Alejandro Chafuen, from Argentina, president of the right-wing think tank *The Acton Institute*
- Eduardo Bolsonaro, Brazilian deputy, son of former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro
- Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right party *Fratelli d'Italia* and current Prime Minister of Italy
- Grover Norquist, prominent United States Republican politician and president of the association Americans for Tax Reform.
- John D. Fonte, of the United States, of the conservative think tank Hudson Institute.
- José Antonio Kast, leader and former presidential candidate of the Republican Party of Chile, of recognized pro-Pinochet affiliation.
- María Romo, president of *Red Familia*, Mexico.
- Pablo Adame, Mexican conservative politician.
- Santiago Abascal, leader of the Spanish far-right party Vox.
- Eduardo Verástegui, from Mexico, founding director of the White House Initiative for Hispanic Prosperity and organizer of two CPAC meetings in Mexico (see below in this article)

It is clear then that supporters of the Charter have in common a marked preference for right-wing ideologies, both in their moderate and extreme versions. Likewise, several members of Mexico's right-wing National Action Party (PAN) originally signed the Charter—senators Julen Rementería and Lily Téllez among others—only to withdraw their support a few days later in the face of public criticism in that country.

⁵ The São Paulo Forum is a collaboration mechanism between Latin American leftist parties created in 1990 by the Workers' Party, Brazil. The Puebla Group is a group of left-wing leaders created by the government of that Mexican state in 2019.

⁶ For a profile of best-selling author Axel Kaiser, see Castro-Rea, 2019.

As indicated, the Charter was proposed and is promoted by the Spanish party Vox. In its ideological platform, this party has been characterized by its conservative, narrow, centralist and ultimately reactionary vision of Spain. Thus, it is deeply supportive of the monarchy, expresses nostalgia for Francoism, opposes the regime of autonomies created by the 1978 constitution—which protects the historical and cultural specificity of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia in particular—and defends a revisionist vision of the Spanish imperial past.

The very notion of *Iberosphere* is an expression of nostalgia for the empire that is part of Vox's Hispanic vision. The project of this party is the defence of Hispanicity, understood as:

...such an extension of fields (cultural, religious, linguistic, philosophical, biological, social, etc.) that was reduced to a cluster of claims exclusively united by a reactionary ideology, with a strong religious content and a propaganda load based on history that promoted a theoretical and rhetorical 'will to empire' (Sepúlveda, 2005, p. 96. Free translation)

THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR FREEDOM: STRENGTHENING ATLANTICISM

The *Iberosphere* project encapsulates the efforts that other transnational right-wing networks have been deploying over the past few years. Even when these networks do not necessarily mention the term, their geopolitical project aims at contributing to the objectives of the *Iberosphere*.

Another international network promoting trans-Atlantic solidarity among right-wing actors is the International Foundation for Freedom (FIL being its acronym in Spanish). FIL is a political association based in Spain, sponsored by the right-wing Popular Party (PP).⁷ Its president is Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, whose right-wing ideological preferences have been manifest since he ran for the presidency of his country in 1990.

On June 30, 2023, the FIL sponsored a meeting in Madrid of political figures and organizations called XVI Atlantic Forum “Ibero-America: Freedom and Democracy”⁸. The Forum gathered businessmen, intellectuals, academics, journalists and political figures; who addressed economic, political and business issues of importance to Latin America and Spain.

Like the signatories of the Madrid Charter, speakers invited to the Forum had in common a clear right-wing ideology. Among them stand out:

- Felipe Calderón, former president of Mexico for the PAN.
- Sebastián Piñera, former president of Chile for right-wing Independent Democratic Union (UDI) party
- Mauricio Macri, former president of Argentina for right-wing party Republican Proposal (Pro)
- Santiago Peña, elected president of Paraguay for the right-wing Colorado Party.

⁷ For an extensive description of the FIL and its transnational connections, see Castro-Rea, 2018.

⁸ The complete video recording of the 2023 and 2024 events is available on the organization's website, <https://fundacionfil.org/xvi-foro-atlantico-iberoamerica-libertad-y-democracia/>.

- Patricia Bullrich, former Minister of Security and president of the Pro party, Argentina.
- Javier Fernández-Lasquetty, Vice President of the Community of Madrid, former Minister of Health of the Popular Party government of Spain.
- Víctor Orlando (aka “Ito”) Bisonó Haza, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Social Christian Reformist Party, Dominican Republic.
- Cristian Larroulet, Secretary General of the Presidency of Chile and main advisor under right-wing president Sebastián Piñera.
- Roberto Salinas León, director of the Center for Latin America of the Atlas Foundation, the most extensive network of right-wing think tanks in the world (Fischer, 2018). Salinas León is the cousin of Ricardo Salinas Pliego, owner of the Mexican television network TV Azteca and president of the libertarian think tank “Caminos de la Libertad”.
- Jano García, author of *The century of criminal socialism*, where he equates socialist regimes with Nazism.
- Álvaro Vargas Llosa, son of FIL’s president Mario Vargas Llosa and author of conservative best sellers (Castro Rea, 2019)
- Gerardo Bongiovanni, president of the right-wing think tank *Fundación Libertad*, and member of *Mont Pelèrin Society*, the international organization where a cluster of intellectuals created classical neoliberalism, (Van Horn & Mirowski, 2009).

In harmony with the right-wing ideology of the invited speakers, the Atlantic Forum presented various diagnoses of the current political situation in Latin America and Spain from a conservative point of view. Without making explicit reference to the Madrid Charter or its promoters—probably because these initiatives were presented by Vox, PP’s electoral rival party—the Forum nevertheless contributed to strengthening the principle of community of conservative interests among Spanish-speaking countries, east and west of the Atlantic. That is, the *Iberosphere*.

The XVII Atlantic Forum, also convened in Madrid, took place on, this time under the title “The Americas and Europe: Freedom and Democracy”. That year, the lineup of speakers, all of them equally right-wing or conservative, included:

- Former president of Colombia, Iván Duque
- Former president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón
- Former president of Ecuador, Guillermo Lasso
- Former minister of the economy of Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro, Paulo Guedes
- Lía Limón, PAN’s mayor of Mexico City’s Álvaro Obregón demarcation.
- Roberto Salinas, Director of International Affairs, at Ricardo Salinas’ Universidad de la Libertad, Mexico.
- Fernando Savater, renowned philosopher
- Álvaro Vargas Llosa, Mario Vargas Llosa’s son, see above.
- Jano García, see above.

- María Corina Machado, leader of the right-wing party *Vente Venezuela*, and the most visible face of opposition in his country against reelection of president Nicolás Maduro.
- Edmundo González, right-wing independent candidate who allegedly won the 2024 presidential elections in Venezuela. Actively endorsed and internationally promoted by María Corina Machado.
- Alberto Núñez Feijóo, president of Spain's Popular Party

NEOS FOUNDATION: "MEXICO AND SPAIN, FRIENDS FOREVER"

NEOS Foundation is another organization contributing to strengthen trans-Atlantic bonds between right-wing actors and institutions. Based in Spain, it is presided by Jaime Mayor Oreja, Popular Party's former Interior Minister (<https://neosfundacion.es/>). The Foundation openly opposes progressive causes like gender equality, abortion rights, national minority rights, and global liberalism.

In December 2, 2024 NEOS held the Forum "Mexico and Spain, Friends Forever"⁹ in Madrid. The title is a direct reference to the rift existing between the governments of Mexico and Spain since 2019, when the government of Mexico sent a letter to the king of Spain inviting him to issue a joint apology to Mexico's Indigenous peoples for the abuses committed during the conquest and colonial period (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-47701876>) Following the king's lack of response, and the Popular Party open mockery of the letter, the government of Mexico declared a moratorium on diplomatic relations between the two countries. Six years later, the tension still exists in these trans-Atlantic official diplomatic relations.

As usual for this kind of events, the lineup of speakers showcased a cross-section of right-wing politicians and their supporters, including:

- Felipe Calderón, former president of México
- Isabel Díaz Ayuso, mayor of Madrid
- Ciro Gómez Leyva, Mexican journalist and anchor for open channels *Imagen Televisión* and *Radio Fórmula*
- Ricardo Cayuela, writer and publisher
- Doris Seedorf, CEO, Softek Europe
- Jaime Olmedo Ramos, president of Camilo José Cela University, Madrid

⁹ <https://neosfundacion.es/mexico-y-espana-amigos-para-siempre/>.

CONFERENCIA POLÍTICA DE ACCIÓN CONSERVADORA (CPAC): PROMOTING REPUBLICANISM IN LATIN AMERICA

The *Conferencia Política de Acción Conservadora* (CPAC) is a somewhat different kind of right-wing transnational network, with a remarkable overlap in goals and membership nonetheless. The main difference with the networks previously discussed is its geographic outreach: prominent political actors and institutions from the United States participate in the network. Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking populations in that country, amounting to approximately 62.1 million people or 18.7% of the population according to the 2020 census, are also targeted. We may thus consider CPAC as a network promoting the *Iberosphere Plus*, expanding the embrace of the right-wing's transnational efforts.

CPAC is an adaptation to the Latin American context of the Conservative Political Action Conference, identified with the same acronym in both English and Spanish, which has brought together key figures of conservatism in the United States since 1974 (Burns, 2022:3). CPAC in turn depends on the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), also from the United States. NCPAC is a “political action committee,” the name given in that country to organizations that raise funds to support political campaigns. Created in 1975, NCPAC contributed to the rise of the conservative revolution within the Republican Party, originally led by Ronald Reagan. This Committee used for the first time the so-called “independent expenses” to support a candidate, which allowed it to exceed the financial limits imposed by electoral legislation. NCPAC has become over time one of the pillars of extreme conservatism in the United States.

CPAC has held two conferences in Mexico, in 2022 and 2024. The first one was organized by Eduardo Verástegui, Mexican television actor and film producer. His most recent production is *Sound of Freedom*, a film that denounces international child trafficking. Close to former president Enrique Peña Nieto, Verástegui was also the founding head of the organization White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative, created by President Donald Trump in his first mandate.

Verástegui has recently stood out as a conservative Catholic politician, founder of the “¡Viva México!” movement and the *México Republicano* party. Thanks to ideological affinity and personal contacts, Verástegui achieved the support of conservative sectors within the US Republican Party to hold the first CPAC from November 18 to 19, 2022 in Mexico City. The event program is available at the link <https://cpacmx.com/cpac-2022-espanol/>.

The event was a meeting of Latin American and US right-wing politicians, with the aim of using international collaboration to promote the influence of related movements at the national level. The event followed up on a meeting held in Brazil in June of that same year (Burns, 2022, p. 3-4). The presentations at the event mixed rejection of the left and its international movements—the Forum of São Paulo in particular—to the regimes of Cuba and Venezuela, to abortion, to homosexuality; with the defence and promotion of traditional gender and family roles. Some speakers, Verástegui in particular, also made statements in strong defence of religion.

Among the speakers at the event were the following, several of them also signatories of the Madrid Charter:

- Steve Bannon, founder of the online political analysis platform *Breitbart News* and campaign advisor to Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential campaign (see below this article for Bannon's further transnational activity)
- Javier Milei, then presidential candidate of Argentina for the far-right party *La libertad avanza*.
- Eduardo Verástegui, from the *Viva México* Movement.
- Jesús Márquez, who succeeded Verástegui as head of the White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative.
- Sara A. Carter, investigative reporter for Fox News.
- Ted Cruz, Republican Senator from Texas
- Alejandro Giammattei, then President of Guatemala.
- Eduardo Bolsonaro, Brazilian deputy, son of former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro
- Lech Wałęsa, former president of Poland, who is credited with bringing down the socialist regime in his country.
- Abby Johnson, former director of the anti-abortion organization Planned Parenthood.
- Raúl Tortolero, leader of the conservative *Ejército Cristero* movement, from Mexico.
- Juan Ángel Soto Gómez, international director of the Disenso Foundation, the organization that created and promotes the Madrid Charter.
- Rodrigo Ivan Cortés, president of *Frente Nacional por la Familia* and vice president of Political Network for Values.
- Christopher Landau, former United States ambassador to Mexico.
- Chiara Barchiesi, founder of the Republican Party of Chile.
- Jean-Lin Lacapelle, spokesperson for the French right-wing party *Rassemblement National*.

As can be seen, unlike the Madrid Charter, the CPAC call goes beyond Spanish-speaking countries, and includes other countries and diverse geographical regions. Of particular importance is the central inclusion of conservative actors from the United States or active in that country, starting with Verástegui himself.

CPAC 2022 ultimately became a platform to promote Verástegui's political ambitions. On July 5, 2023, the actor broadcast a video online in which he denounced the dubious conservative credentials of Xóchitl Gálvez, presidential candidate of the electoral coalition in which the National Action Party (PAN), the oldest and most influential party on the right in Mexico¹⁰, participates. Titled "The PAN is dead," the video argues that Gálvez betrayed the party's conservative principles, since several years ago she publicly declared that he had been a Trotskyist. According to Verástegui, Gálvez's selection shows that the PAN fell prey to "progressive supremacism" like the rest of Mexico's political parties, including of course those on the left. All party

¹⁰ Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elf8qZkVxic>.

leaders, Verástegui maintains, are already the same: they promote communism, Trotskyism and the populist left.

For this reason, Verástegui called for the creation of an alternative movement to strengthen what he considers Mexico's three pillars: God, country and family. "We are not going to allow them to steal our souls," he says.

This video is interpreted as the launch of Verástegui's presidential candidacy, at the head of the *Viva México* Movement (Ramos, 2023). Verástegui already received support for these aspirations directly from Donald Trump, present at the launch in the United States of his recent film. Referring to Verástegui, Trump literally expressed the following:

"...what a great job. *El presidente*¹¹ is a possibility. You've made this movie the most amazing movie anywhere in the world, so I think maybe becoming the president of Mexico is comparable, right?" (cited in Uresti, 2023.)

However, Verástegui's presidential candidacy did not materialize, thereby forestalling a confrontation between right-wing options in Mexico. Verástegui was able to collect only 14% of the number of signatures required to officially become presidential candidate (Barragán 2024). Despite the religious accent in his speeches, he failed to enlist the support of Catholics, nominally 88% of Mexico's population according to official data.

CPAC will nonetheless be able to hold another international meeting in Mexico in 2024. CPAC 2024 took place in Mexico City, on August 24. The meeting reiterated the same themes and tropes that had been discussed two years earlier, with heavy, messianic religious undertones. Verástegui announced the creation of a new political party in 2025. Besides Verástegui, speakers included:

- Agustín Laje, libertarian Argentinian economist and writer, author of several right-wing bestsellers
- José Antonio Kast, former right-wing candidate to Chile's presidency
- Eduardo Bolsonaro, son of former far-right president of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro
- Matt and Mercedes Schlapp, leaders of CPAC, USA
- Rodrigo Cortés, leader of *Frente Nacional por la Familia*

Javier Milei, already president of Argentina, had confirmed his participation, but ended up cancelling. Donald Trump, then Republican presidential candidate, sent a video recorded message; as well as Giorgia Meloni, Italy's prime minister, Jair Bolsonaro, and Vox leader Santiago Abascal.

Several attendees openly expressed support for Trump's candidacy and were wearing the classic red MAGA hat (Raziel, 2024).

¹¹ Trump expressed these two words in Spanish.

MÉXICO REPUBLICANO AND EJÉRCITO CRISTERO: TRANSNATIONAL REPUBLICAN POLITICS WITH TRADITIONALIST CATHOLIC FLAVOUR

Verástegui's candidacy prospects were supported by the nascent *México Republicano* party, led by Juan Iván Peña Neder. Interviewed by Julio Hernández López (aka Julio Astillero) on June 30, 2023, Peña Neder criticized the selection of Xóchitl Gálvez as a PAN candidate, because according to him Gálvez is a Marxist and therefore does not represent PAN's traditional values (Astillero, 2023). His point of view is thus the same as Verástegui's. Gálvez's selection was due to the fact that then leader of the party, Marko Cortés, hijacked the nomination processes to impose candidates at will. The imposition of Gálvez, according to Peña Neder, is reminiscent of the imposition of Dilma Rousseff as president of Brazil by outgoing president Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva in 2011.

México Republicano party then offers a truly right-wing alternative to voters. Peña Neder hopes that something similar to what happened in Brazil—Rousseff is removed from office, and new elections make way for the conservative candidate Jair Bolsonaro to become president—will happen in Mexico. According to Peña Neder, a "Mexican Bolsonaro is necessary, who comes to power in alliance with the conservative forces of the continent" (Astillero, 2023). *México Republicano* party could have provided

Verástegui's candidacy with logistical capacity in the twenty states of the republic where it already has a presence, as well as in twenty other states in the United States. In this way, it would also give a voice to Mexican voters residing in the United States; with the additional advantage that Verástegui's right-wing presidency would coincide with "the imminent presidency of Donald Trump" (Astillero, 2023) PAN supporters who feel betrayed are of course welcome to join the new party.

Raúl Tortolero, leader of the conservative *Ejército Cristero* movement and speaker at CPAC, also participated in the Astillero interview. In response to the journalist's explicit question, Tortolero stated that the ideal candidate for the conservative front is Eduardo Verástegui. His job as president "would be fantastic," because he is a fervent Catholic, a person with values who combats child trafficking and also makes good films. You cannot defeat progressivism with more progressivism, Tortolero added, an authentic opposition is required, a true right, like the one Verástegui represents. This is what Vox and its leader Santiago Abascal did in Spain, who dared to break with the Popular Party because they considered it moderate and thus created a real right-wing alternative.

According to Tortolero, Verástegui represents very well the seven pillars of the necessary "cultural counterrevolution", that is:

- defence of faith and religious freedom
- defence of life from conception
- defence of the family
- defence of private property
- defence of the homeland against globalism
- defence of freedoms
- defence of universal rights

This candidacy could easily collect the million signatures required to appear on the ballot, since Mexico is overwhelmingly Catholic, Tortolero stated. The facts, however, would prove him wrong in 2024.

POLITICAL NETWORK FOR VALUES, HAZTE OIR AND CITIZENGO: DEFENDING THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY

Other recent manifestations of right-wing Ibero-American transnationalism are Political Network for Values, *Hazte Oir* and CitizenGO. Like CPAC, they also bring together conservative personalities from Latin America and the United States.

Political Network for Values (PNV) defines itself as “A global platform to enable the inter-connection of political representatives to share, defend and promote the values of life, marriage, family and freedom” (politicalnetworkforvalues.org). Its Board of Directors is chaired by former Chilean presidential candidate José Antonio Kast, its Honorary President is Jaime Mayor Oreja, former Minister of the Interior of Spain during the Popular Party government and NEOS president, and its Secretary General is Rodrigo Iván Cortés, president of *Frente Nacional para la Familia*, from Mexico. Other Board members include:

- Sharon Slater, President of Family Watch Institute, from the United States
- Brian Brown, President of International Organization for the Family, USA.
- Alfonso Aguilar, President of Latino Partnership for Conservative Principles, USA.
- Carlos Polo, director for Latin America of the US-based Population Research Institute.
- Travis Weber, director of the Center for Religious Liberty, from the United States
- Amy Sinclair, Republican Senator from Iowa

Consistent with its transnational vocation, PNV announced a Transatlantic Summit held in New York in November 2023, with the theme “Affirming universal human rights”; understood of course in terms of the right.

For its part, *Hazte Oír* is another transnational network of right-wing organizations (hazteoir.org). Its motto is: “Defending life, family and freedom around the world.” It is part of the larger network *CitizenGO*, based in Madrid and with presence in fifteen cities around the world. Its board includes the following people:

- Ignacio Arsuaga, from Vox
- Brian Brown, also PNV member
- Carlos Polo, also PNV member

STEVE BANNON'S *THE MOVEMENT*, DEBATE WITH POPE FRANCIS AND CONTINENTAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Without a doubt, another important actor in the transnational right-wing movement is Steve Bannon, although admittedly with indirect, lesser influence over the *Iberosphere*. Advisor and trusted man for political affairs of Donald Trump during his first presidential campaign, the two characters distanced from each other shortly after the latter assumed the first presidency in 2017. Bannon then dedicated himself fully to the transnational promotion of right-wing ideologies and strategies to win elections. As of late, he is a supporter of the second Trump administration from outside.

In July 2018, Bannon created a foundation to provide analysis, advice, research and information to right-wing parties and organizations, particularly in Europe. He named the foundation simply *The Movement*. He received the support of powerful allies, such as Marine Le Pen, president of the *Rassemblement National* party in France, and Viktor Orbán, president of Hungary (Anonymous, 2018). Its express objective is to confront the *Open Society Foundation*, a transnational organization created and financed by George Soros in 1984, which promotes liberal causes.

However, Bannon's activism is focused on Europe, his activities in the Americas are sporadic and uncertain. As noted above, he participated as an online speaker at the first CPAC meeting in Mexico. His frequent visits to Brazil during Bolsonaro's presidency have been reported. But for some reason he decided to adopt Europe as his central focus of attention.

One of his favourite targets is Pope Francis, of Argentine origin. Bannon, openly Christian, believes that the administrative apparatus of the Catholic Church must be reformed (Engel & Kennett, 2019). A conservative change is necessary in the Vatican, and Bannon is willing to contribute to that change because it can have a broad global reach; particularly in the Catholic world, of which Latin America forms an important part. He criticizes in particular the Pope's position on minorities, and his unconditional acceptance of immigrants. Referring to the Catholic Church, Bannon declared that "They need illegal aliens to fill the churches, they have an economic interest in immigration, unlimited illegal immigration" (cited in Rose, 2017).

Bannon also places direct blame on the Vatican for the sexual abuse scandals plaguing the Catholic Church, which have contributed to increased public disapproval and exposed a weak flank within the Church. Although Pope Francis has confronted the problem by declaring that "every abuse is an atrocity" and removed cardinals and other clerics accused of such crimes, Bannon uses the scandals to weaken the Pope's leadership and his public image (Engel & Kennett, 2019). Thus, Bannon wishes to combat the historic transnationalism of the Catholic Church with his own version of right-wing transnationalism.

Furthermore, Bannon wants to compete with the Pope on the correct interpretation of Catholic doctrine. He renovated an 800-year-old monastery located 75 km southeast of Rome to offer intensive training courses on "true Catholic knowledge" (Townsend, 2019). Bannon believes that Pope Francis' liberalism is ruining the Catholic Church, so he tries to restore what he considers to be the true faith. In his courses, Bannon brings together right-wing activists,

politicians, and academics to exchange experiences and strategies on how to better combat globalism (Engel & Kennett, 2019).

An ideological ally of Bannon is conservative Cardinal Raymond Burke, former archbishop of St. Louis Missouri, who also criticizes Pope Francis' liberalism. However, Burke withdrew his support for the monastery school when Bannon unceremoniously denounced the "gay agenda" supposedly promoted by the Vatican (Townsend, 2019).

The conservative movement in the United States is thus fighting the modernizing reforms of the Catholic Church, which according to Pope Francis aim to restore authentic Christian values. The Pope advocates freedom of representation, including the LGBTQ community, diverse political opinions, and reconciliation among religions, cultures and nationalities (Poggioli, 2017). The Vatican reform is not afraid of diversity, but rather advocates compassion for marginalized groups such as the poor, homosexuals, and immigrants (Engel & Kennett, 2019). Catholic conservatives in the United States have criticized the Pope for not supporting bishops who wish to deny communion to President Biden and other Democrat politicians for their pro-abortion stance (Lisi, 2022).

Pope Francis openly criticized the first Trump administration's proposal to build a wall on the border with Mexico, stating that building walls instead of bridges is not Christian, because it excludes people and causes suffering (Poggioli, 2017). Thus, he directly confronts the conservative movement in the United States, which supports the construction of the border wall while boasting of defending true Christian values. Steve Bannon maintains that the Pope's position is due to the Church trying to benefit economically from donations that migrants bring to the Church. However, in reality most parishes spend more resources serving immigrants than they obtain from them (Rose, 2017).

The Pope also has vocal allies within the Catholic Church. For example, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, who maintains that the issue of migration is not political but an ethical imperative (Rose, 2017). Dolan believes that the Church has a sacred duty to preach the integrity and respectful treatment of immigrants. Open borders for immigration are rooted in the Bible: "I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35).

Furthermore, Nolan adds, defending immigration also honors the ideology of the "American dream," praised by nationalist movements in the United States.

In 2016, Steve Bannon advised then-Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, leader of the right-wing party *Lega Nord*, to attack the Pope on the issue of immigration (Al Jazeera, 2022). Salvini, currently Vice Prime Minister of the Italian government, has been characterized by an aggressively anti-immigrant position. In 2017, Salvini was sued for failing to fulfill his humanitarian obligations by refusing to allow a boat loaded with refugees to be rescued at sea, and land on the Italian island of Lampedusa. In a meeting in Washington, Bannon declared that the Pope is an enemy of conservatism, and suggested that Salvini attack him from his position in the Italian government (Townsend, 2019). After the meeting, Salvini took a photo of himself holding a T-shirt with the legend: "Benedict is my Pope."

CONCLUSIONS

There is currently a vast trans-Atlantic movement linking major right-wing political actors in Latin America, Spain and the United States. The movement contains a growing overlap of actors—active and past politicians, writers, academics, journalists—who participate in more than one network. These networks are novel and unexpected, because they blend different versions of right-wing and conservative ideologies that in the past did not look eye to eye: libertarians, militarists, Catholic traditionalists, nationalists, promoters of Pan American relations or Hispanism, etc. They seem to have created a strategic alliance around radical right-wing objectives, in a crusade to defeat global and national liberalism and the left.

The common rationale in this crusade seems to be provided by the New Right. Faced with the crisis of the liberal world order, the New Right proposes a multipolarism built on the basis of zones of civilization. The New Right thus reinterprets the progressive principle of multiculturalism to promote instead a right-wing version of it, which De Benoist calls “differentialism”: the preservation and promotion of “authentic regional cultures” anchored in ancestral identities (ethnicity, language, religion, etc.), currently threatened by globalism and immigration (Bar-On, 2011, p. 208). The efforts to build the *Iberosphere* contribute to advancing this project of cultural selection to reorganize the world.

However, despite recent efforts to create a common transnational right-wing movement, two contrasting projects can be discerned: an association of countries exclusively of Ibero-American background, or including the United States and other countries in that great international right-wing coalition. While the Madrid Charter, NEOS and FIL promote the former project, CPAC, *The Movement* and related associations (PNV, Hazte Oir and *CitizenGO*) advocate for a broader conservative front. Given the original anti-US vocation of the New Right, this divergence contains the seeds of a potential conflict between right-wing transnational organizations. However, such a conflict has not yet been manifested.

The ideas of the New Right, until recently considered exotic, radical and confined to academic or philosophical circles, have become part of the common sense of large sectors of the world’s population. More and more people refer to the “globalist agenda” to identify the origin of the world’s problems, and use the ideological framework created by the New Right to propose solutions: dismantle the UN, limit immigration, question international action based on science (climate change, health policies), combating “gender ideology” and the “gay agenda”, etc. The covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine helped accelerate this process of massive ideological conversion.

Is the New Right winning the global ideological battle without us even realizing it?

Trump’s return to the White House in 2025, against all odds, and his principal advisor’s Elon Musk affinities with replacement theory, White supremacism and nativism, make this possibility real and disturbing.

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